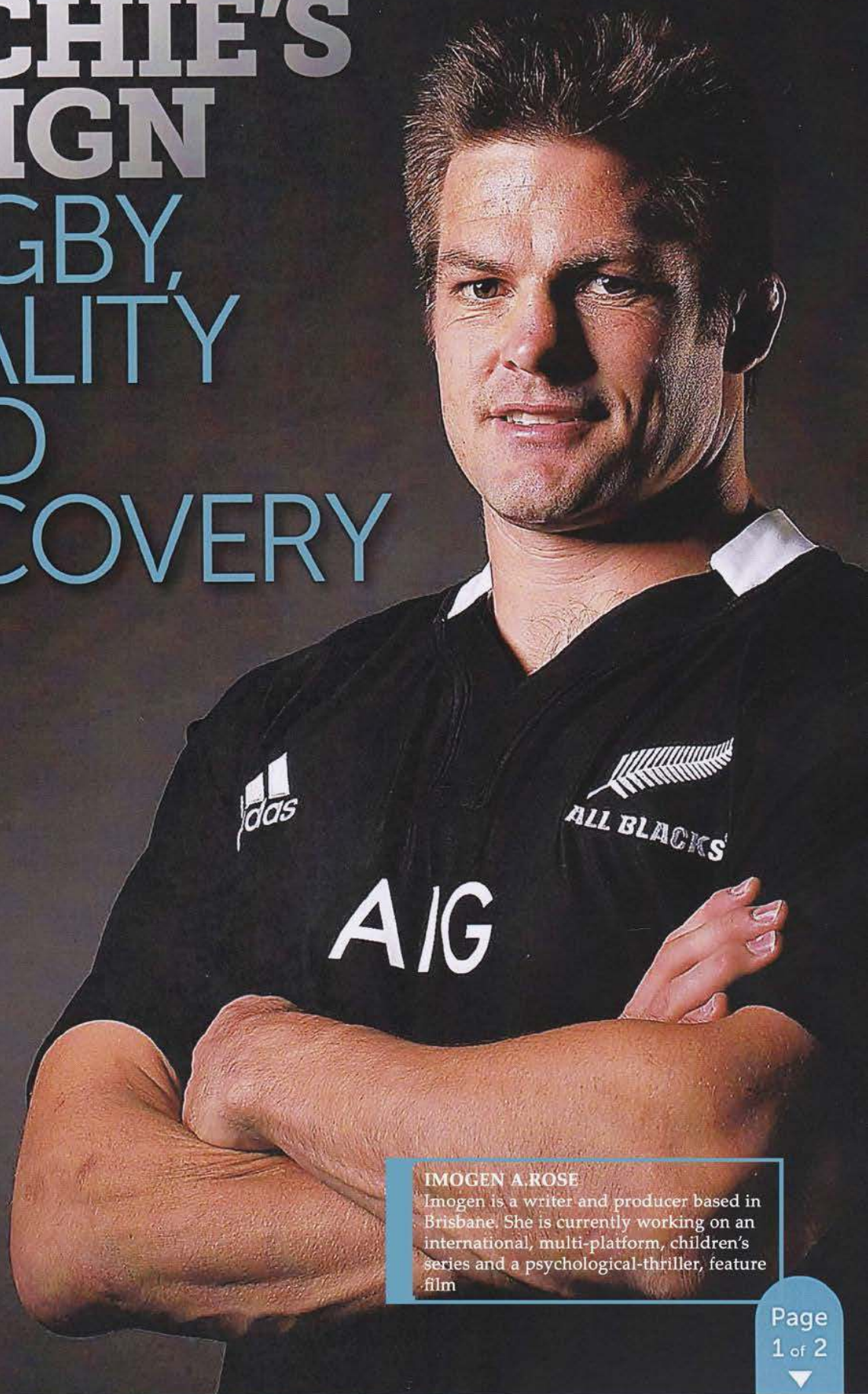


# RICHIE'S REIGN

## RUGBY, REALITY AND RECOVERY



**IMOGEN A. ROSE**

Imogen is a writer and producer based in Brisbane. She is currently working on an international, multi-platform, children's series and a psychological-thriller, feature film





TAP THE BOXES BELOW TO REVEAL RICHIE'S STATS...

LOOSE FORWARD	31/12/1980 INOAMARU	1.87M, 106KG
17/11/2001 VS IRELAND IN DUBLIN	116	95
CANTERBURY	34	50 (10T)
CRUSADERS	110	120 (24T)

**RICHIE MCCA**W IS IN MANY WAYS RUGBY'S RENAISSANCE MAN. THE MOST CAPPED AND SUCCESSFUL ALL BLACK TO DATE, HE IS A PIONEERING PLAYER WHO HAS ESTABLISHED AN UNPRECEDENTED RUGBY RECORD. HE IS A QUALIFIED PILOT, ACADEMICALLY GIFTED, HE CAN PLAY THE SCOTTISH BAGPIPES AND, HE'S A GENTLEMAN.

**EXERCISE SHOULD BE THE FIRST THING THAT COMES INTO YOUR DAY NOT THE LAST BECAUSE THAT'S THE THING THAT OFTEN GETS MISSED**





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**WHEN I RECEIVED** confirmation of my interview with Richie McCaw, I knew to remain typically tight-lipped. He is a man respected and revered well beyond the beautiful shores of his home country, New Zealand. Like most standouts, opinions of him are also fairly black and white. Thus, I could immediately hear the triumphant lauding, or conversely, equally emotion-based, condemnation, of the man widely regarded as the greatest rugby player ever. I could also imagine the advice, even commands, about when to either bow, or alternately, raise the elbow for a chicken-wing (though here, the impact wouldn't equal a mite's wing).

Fortunately, I'm not a tweeter.

Perceptions too, often say more about the perceiver than the person being perceived.

Thus, I was happy to wait and to allow Richie McCaw to speak for himself, in the process providing Fitness First with a first-hand insight into some of the things that have contributed to his amazing success.

McCaw is a measured individual who keeps things in perspective. He has a broad range of interests and is fuelled by a desire to continually learn, achieve and lead by example. His strategic focus is reflective of the discipline and diligence of the All Blacks as a champion sporting team. The All Blacks don't just go out there and hope for the best, nor do they live off the results of their last game or even their golden legacy. They too approach the game of rugby with a determined view



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to continue improving and playing to their best. And who can argue? In 110 years, the All Blacks have won 376 of their 498 test matches. This is an unrivalled dominance of which it would be hard to find a comparable sporting example.

Importantly, McCaw's experience and wisdom transcends the world of rugby, bearing relevance to the 'every' man and woman in everyday life.

Indeed, there is a philosophy and psychology behind his method and approach to fitness and rugby that might be adapted to any number of challenging environments.

This sense of general relevance is one of the great things about McCaw's book, *Richie McCaw: The Open Side*, particularly in a country like Australia, where sport has always provided a ready analogy in virtually every sphere of our culture for just about any situation - friendship, business, academia, even the judicial system. Thus, many Australians will take more than they perhaps expect to from reading *The Open Side*.

McCaw talks a lot about enjoyment. He clearly enjoys his life and his rugby. He has a balanced view that supports his professional and personal lifestyle. While he demonstrates an elite level of fitness well and truly beyond the norm, there



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is still much that the average person can apply to their own sense of wellbeing, fitness and health.

We can all be happier and healthier individuals. Always . And a little bit of help from the top can only be a good thing.

So what does the word 'health' mean to Richie McCaw? 'It encapsulates a whole lot of things. It means eating well, getting exercise, getting the right sleep, it means you're feeling good and you're enjoying life'.

Becoming healthier is a decision that involves challenges and goals. McCaw supports the view that real change is only ever truly possible through individual will.

'If you've got something to aim for that's what I love and that's what keeps me going. It might be just a run for 20 minutes; that might be the challenge you're after. But, if you're just doing it for the sake of doing it, at some point it's going to get boring'.

McCaw emphasises the fundamental role of habit in maintaining any fitness regime : 'The biggest thing with exercise is it comes down to habit...exercise should be the first thing that comes into your day not the last because that's the thing that often gets missed'.

'At the end of the day you're going to be a lot more productive in anything you do if you're feeling healthy and



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fit. You don't have to do a whole lot you just have to do it regularly and enough'.

It's worth remembering that a recent study in *The Lancet* indicated even a bare minimum of 15 minutes exercise a day could boost life expectancy by three years and cut death risk by 14 per cent.

Sport and exercise should also be enjoyable. If you're not the type of person to swim lonely laps, or, walk with the birds, then a team sport or even a gym environment is a great way to be socially, as well as physically, engaged.

McCaw highlights the many benefits of the camaraderie and sportsmanship that come from team sports. He respects and values the interdependence and trust between players. Moreover, the ability to go as hard as possible against your opposition yet still shake hands when the whistle blows is fundamentally important to McCaw and indeed, the All Blacks Team.

'At the end of the day, it's a game of rugby. Yes, that's important, but it's not the end of the world. Being a decent bloke and being able to shake hands with the guy you've been going at, well that's what being a sportsman's all about, and in the All Blacks you try and drive that sort of attitude'.

McCaw makes the point that rugby, as a whole, has retained a strong sense of sportsmanship, saying that 'the values that were there before it went professional are still there'. This is a big part of Rugby. Win or lose most



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Australians, New Zealanders, British and other supporters, like to see their side acknowledge the other team at the end of the game. It's a reminder that it is a game and that there is life and a world outside of it.

Here again one senses McCaw's hold upon priority and proportion. 'Anything you do in life, even if you absolutely love it and you do it all the time, there's going to be a point where you're sick of it. So if rugby's your job, you've got to have things away from it so that you look forward to going back to what you love'. McCaw has a healthy slate of personal and charitable interests outside of rugby. His hobbies, such as gliding, provide alternative challenges and 'keeps me wanting to go back' to rugby.

McCaw enjoys the satisfaction that arrives from knowing he has triumphed over adversity and challenge. He persevered through the three final games of the 2011 World Cup with three separate, and essentially untreated, breaks in his right foot (one for each game) to ultimate victory. While this is unlikely to be the challenge you're seeking, the process of endurance, psychological and physical strength and ultimately, reward, fundamentally remains the same for each of us. That is, the challenge itself is far less important than being prepared to embrace challenge and to learn through that experience.

The important thing, says McCaw - whether it's exercising,



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quitting smoking, eating better, or any challenge really - is that the individual must want to do it, 'You've got to believe it yourself. You can't be told'.

In terms of professional athletes, McCaw shares the view of my former swimming coach, John Carew - who trained Kieren Perkins to Olympic glory at three Olympics - that it takes much more than talent to achieve greatness. It seems clear that talent will get an individual so far, but what really separates competitors and paves the road to success is desire, discipline, dedication, determination and sheer bloody hard work!

So, for budding professional sports stars, decide how great you really want to be and how much you're prepared to give, because according to McCaw, there are no fairy tales or magic cures. What's more, if you read *The Open Side* you'll soon discover precisely how much pain some people can withstand!

McCaw says that success - in any sphere - depends upon being able to perform when it counts, especially under pressure: 'The longer I've been around the more I understand that that the difference in the top sport but also, probably the top anything, is how you control the mind under pressure'.

Richie McCaw has his eye on all components of his profession, psychological and physical, including the need for equilibrium.



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Headvocates understanding nutritional needs and eating well. 'When you're training really hard, if you don't eat properly you can't recover, you can't train. At the end of the day it's a simple equation : what you burn off is what you need to put in, rather than the other way around.' It is important for everyone to determine the right exercise program and the right eating regime. If you're looking to lose, or gain weight, what and when you eat does matter.

Richie McCaw's approach to injury, recovery and rest is an important element of his longevity. At age 22, McCaw suffered a disc injury to his back. He recovered from the immediate injury but later developed chronic back problems. Although initially dismissive of the notion, McCaw was advised to follow a program focusing on increasing his core strength, including Pilates. It was a successful approach. Including some form of core exercises - even for 10 minutes - three times a week, has become a staple of his training regime.

McCaw recommends remaining inventive and imaginative in dealing with injuries. You have to accept your limitations but remember that 'there's always something you can do'. It's this never lie down, Darwinian attitude and indomitable determination to deal with whatever challenges arise that has helped define McCaw's success.



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McCaw is currently in the middle of a six-month professional sabbatical -a careful and deliberate decision in preparation for the 2015 Rugby World Cup. The challenge for McCaw now is how to ensure his sabbatical is restful but also conducive to a professionally practical level of fitness. For a man who thrives on and grows stronger through challenge, it seems a given that come July, the world will be welcoming the rugby return of a man who has set the bench-mark even higher.

RichieMcCaw'sextraordinarysuccessledgerisa testimony unto itself. However, it is the sense of a good man that impresses most, and it is the ability of each of us to overcome adversity - in any circumstance - that shines from within *The Open Side*. Richie McCaw, his experiences and achievements, are a reminder of what may come from strength, stamina and spirit!



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